

Chipping Away Barricades

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Chipping Away Barricades

by [On a Happier Note](#)

Summary

Eren stopped and stood there frozen in place. It was all too similar. Too much.
He took a faltering step back.

“What are you doing? Don’t go!”

Don’t go...

After a few fumbling steps, he ran forward.

Notes

Set sometime in the first half of cadet training.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Today's ODM practice drill took place at the edge of the forest next to the training grounds. The objective: to traverse through the trees, reaching the other side using the least amount of gas. ODM skills and manoeuvres were always a favourite part of Eren's day as he saw the obvious usefulness in learning these for his ambitions to join the Survey Corps.

So far, the cadets had got the basics down pat. They'd even started some more challenging advanced techniques for combat, evasion, and formation, but the last week had been all about efficiency. Being out on the field, you could have all the skills in the world, but if you don't conserve your gas, you'll become grounded and easy titan food.

Of course those not planning on joining the Scouts saw today's exercise as a competition to increase their ranking and optimise test scores, but Eren solely focused on the practical survival element. Today wasn't about speed, fancy flipping or killing; it was to get from A to B with the minimal expenditure of resources. And Eren was excited and curious to see how he'd manage.

The assistant trainers had been setting them off one by one into the trees, allowing a generous gap between cadets to generate comparable, individual results. This also guaranteed each cadet would have to do their own navigation and forge their own path through without the help or interference of others.

The starting position was nearly empty now, most trainees had already been released with only a short line remaining. There was quiet chatter including the occasional brag of skills or worried comment on marks. The last two cadets in the queue waited in a huffy silence facing away from each other.

Those two cadets were Eren and Jean.

After causing a ruckus in the mess hall at lunch, the two had been assigned to clean up after the meal alone and as such, were the last to arrive at the start line.

Though their most recent argument was fresh, overall, the two didn't *actually* hate each other's guts. Only on the off day. Their differences in opinion led to rivalry in training and with their similarity in skill levels, it intensified their efforts and aided their performances. But only when not directly pitted against the other, in those cases things got ugly.

Arriving just a bit before Eren, Jean grappled up to the starting position first to have his name checked off before swinging away. *See you on the other side*, Eren thought, watching Jean carefully pick his grappling positions and best utilise his swing lengths until he disappeared amongst the foliage. Eren honestly wished for Jean to do his best; it would make beating him most satisfying.

Pulling himself up into position, he waited for the go-ahead then sprung off the ledge, securing his anchors and swinging away between the trunks.

Oddly enough, ODM training was the time-of-day Eren enjoyed the most. The other cadets dreaded propelling themselves through the air with thin cables, doing flips and other nauseating manoeuvres all meanwhile dual-wielding the sharpest swords imaginable. Although ODM skills contributed massively to their overall ranking, many felt the skill unnecessary as they would never use it within the walls, and never against a titan.

However, for Eren, the skill held the utmost importance in his heart. This was the do-or-die skill to master for his future aspirations of joining the Survey Corps. Every lesson was highly relevant, he understood the practical application of every drill, and nothing felt more empowering than zipping through the air and delivering deathblows to the titan cut-outs strewn below. It was the culmination of his and humanity's power to fight back and it gave him pride and hope for the future seeing how well he'd progressed with it so far.

Mind a blissful blank, he alternated his anchor points from left to right, attaching and detaching from trunks and branches. He dipped towards the forest floor at the bottom of each swing before rising and repeating it all again, a slow, rhythmic pendulum progressing along the course. Dodging around obstacles and running across tree limbs where practical, he'd never admit it aloud, but this was the most fun he'd had in a while.

A small smile graced his features as he flew through the occasional patch of sunlight penetrating the canopy above. The cathartic sounds of his lines firing and gusts of air releasing amongst the whispering of leaves and groaning of trees was a peaceful soundtrack to his afternoon.

"Heeeeeeey! Is anyone out there?" A voice sounded out ahead of him through the woods.

"Huh?" Being the last cadet to run through this training exercise, he was surprised to hear someone else still out here. *They must have got lost or stuck somehow*, he concluded, faintly annoyed at how someone could achieve that doing such a simple task.

"I need some help here! Hello?" Proving Eren's assumptions correct, someone truly had stuffed this up. While Eren cared about marks (mainly that he at least passed important tests), his desire to help those in trouble won out and with a sigh he veered off his course towards the voice.

"Where are you?" he shouted, zipping between trees in the general direction whilst scanning the surroundings.

"Down here!" the voice responded, and now that he was closer, he realised it was Jean he was going after. *Idiot. What did you do this time?*

Further ahead, he spotted the area where they practiced titan takedowns, the giant cut-outs casting long shadows in the remaining dappled sunlight. "Eren!" Jean called from below and Eren noticed that one of the wooden titans had broken and collapsed. Lowering himself to the undergrowth, he stowed his triggers and ran towards the large pile of plank segments until he spotted Jean trapped beneath them.

Eren stopped and stood there frozen in place. Seeing Jean, pinned to the ground, hand reaching out for him. It was all too similar. Too much.

He took a faltering step back.

“What are you doing? Don’t go!”

Don’t go...

After a few fumbling steps, he ran forward.

Rapidly throwing the debris he could move off to the side, he was left with a large section still covering Jean, his heavy hitching breaths and shaking hands didn't go unnoticed during this. The trapped teen tried desperately to claw his way out from under the mass but was unable to free his lower body. Planting his feet, Eren strained to lift the section, the low creaking of beams the only sign of his struggle. Jean thought he heard the groaning of bones in Eren's hands, teeth, and spine as they ground together, but he hoped he only imagined it.

Panting laboriously, he again positioned his legs and heaved, achieving the same result as earlier.

“C’m on!” he strained, his strength and composure running thin.

“Eren! Stop it! You won't be able to lift it like that!” Jean reasoned, trying to get his attention seeing that he wasn't getting anywhere. Eren’s hands were rubbed raw, the countless splinters digging into them going as unnoticed as Jean’s words while he continued with frantic fixation.

“No. No! Not again!” Eren practically pleaded, further confusing and worrying Jean. Noticing Eren's manic and frenzied state, he tried to be patient with him even when he wasn’t being particularly helpful. He found Eren having tears in his eyes scarier than being somewhat crushed under a wood heap. Seeing his usual anger and determination turn to despair just felt intrinsically wrong, even to Jean.

“Idiot, just stop and listen for a second! What I meant is you need to use your gas to help you lift that piece. I’ll crawl out while you lift it.” It somewhat worked to gain Eren’s attention; he looked less dazed but was still staring at him and not really seeing Jean.

The message was received though. Anchoring his grapples above him and gripping the timber once more, he released a large burst of air which successfully aided him in clearing the panel off Jean. Said cadet quickly scrambled out from under the suspended pile before Eren shut off the gas and dropped the burden violently.

Retracting his lines and adrenaline spent, Eren slowly teetered over backwards into a tree. Sliding down the trunk, he brought his knees to his chest, blocking himself away from Jean and the outside world while still encompassed in one of his trauma's making. There was silence between the two boys except for the faint rustling of leaves and short, wheezing breaths from Eren. Jean did a quick assessment of himself, concluding that aside from being

sore, scraped, and bruised, he'd surprisingly made it out scot free. Well, his ODM gear was busted but that could be replaced. He dreaded that conversation with the Commandant. Ignoring that topic, he got back to the issue at hand; Eren. "Eren... Are you with me now?"

After one of the longest minutes in Jean's life, Eren shakily spoke once he recovered his awareness.

"How did... You end up... Like that?" He gasped, still somewhat out of breath.

Not really addressing the massive freak-out you just had but this is a start. I'll answer this for now and question later.

"I was using these higher anchor points on the taller trees to allow for maximum swing length to conserve momentum and- Well... The best anchor points had been overused since we went last and one of my grapples ripped free. I guess I was focusing too much on fixing the situation above me I didn't notice I was on a direct course for that titan cut-out until it was too late. You saw the aftermath."

Eren sucked in a breath through his gritted teeth, eyes shut whilst he was sent back to what happened moments ago, overlayed with the events of that day a few years ago.

"I don't get you; you're fine taking another cadet to the medic after they had their shoulder impaled by a grapple, and all the other grisly sights we've encountered in training, yet this is what terrified you the most? The only other time I've seen you even close to this worked up was when you talked about that day--"

Of course. That day. Jean's mind caught up to his mouth and he realised that there was only one thing that would've traumatised Eren this badly and it was back then. Attempting to get specific details of that day from Eren was near impossible. He would either clam up entirely, get overly emotional and leave, or punch you in the face. Or all three on a bad day. And because Jean was far from being Eren's friend, he didn't have a clue as to how what just occurred triggered this reaction.

"You're right, it did remind me of that day." Jean had never been so unhappy to be right, especially after hearing it from Yeager. Since titans seemed to enrage Eren, he figured he'd lost loved ones that day. And since his sibling Mikasa and only friend Armin were fine...

"Did it remind you of what happened to your parents?" Jean blurted, immediately chastising himself for his lack of tact. Eren levelled him with a pointed yet scrutinising look, and finding no ill will, decided to answer.

"My mother yes, I think my father's still alive." *That's quite an odd answer but that can of worms can be for another day.* Luckily Eren went on.

"That day, I had a fight with my mother and ran off into town with Mikasa. Not long after meeting up with Armin, the Colossal Titan appeared and destroyed the outer gate. Our family home, where we'd all lived together, my parents, Mikasa and me, the house we'd been in just hours ago, had collapsed on her, crushed by gate debris that bastard kicked. She was pinned

there by the beams and roof as the titans started flooding through the gate.” *Sweet Sina, is that what today looked like to him?*

“There was nothing we could do. To be there, *right there* beside her and be too weak to save her as the titans approached was maddening. I could see she already knew her fate and tried to remain calm and get us to run. In her last moments she was still trying to save us. It took all her bravery and resolve to stay strong and collected for us even in the face of such horrors. A Garrison soldier just grabbed Mikasa and me and ran. I don’t blame him, but leaving her like that, crying and reaching out to us as the titan approached, picked her up and ate her will always stay with me.”

Always.

No. No! Not again!

Fuck.

“Mikasa said ‘it’s the same thing all over again,’ at the time and she was right, it was her losing her family again. The strong taking from the weak just because they can.

“Seeing someone trapped, just brought back the sense of hopelessness and impending doom. All this training is to become strong enough to make a difference, to cause a better outcome in the fight against the titans when it inevitably comes again. So I never find myself in a similar situation and lose those important to me to this cruel world when I could’ve tried harder. I have the will to fight, I just need the strength to back it.”

It's just wrong Jean thought, *for a 10-year-old to feel responsible for a tragedy far beyond his control. For him to be stuck in a perpetual state of anger, inadequacy, and hypervigilance.* He understood more now why Eren had this mindset, but it just wasn't fair on himself to have it. And comparing his life to Eren's, life just wasn't fair either. And though each of them worked hard and achieved similarly with their merit, nothing would bring back what was already lost or change what brought them originally to enlisting in the military.

Though he might not be able to change Eren's mind on many things (and damn had he tried), he wanted to make sure the other knew he hadn't lost everything, still had family and friends who valued him and had much he could gain. And hopefully help him value himself a bit more too.

A small part of him hated how wound up in Eren's views and personal life he was becoming, but he realised that for him and many other cadets here, they didn't really have anyone back home to worry about and support them. But he'd still 'support' him in his own obnoxious, annoying way, Eren would accept no less. They already have their own system; like communicating by reading between the lines and tone of the straight out insults they spat at each other. And arguing to show they listened to each other.

“Well as long as you also use your head occasionally, I think you'll be strong enough. And if you hang around smart people like me and your friend Armin. Or strong people like me or Mikasa. Anyway I guess you saved me today so there's that too.” Eren found the sentiment oddly touching, even when littered with Jean's bragging. Time to take him down a peg.

“You’re lucky you didn’t go last Jean. Who knows how long it’d be before someone came to find you.”

“Good thing you were so slow getting to the training grounds to go last. But gee, you took forever getting your ass over here.”

“I would’ve still finished the course much faster than you. And you’re not out of the woods yet, I can see your gear; you’re not going anywhere.”

“You wouldn’t leave an injured comrade behind though right?”

“Of course not!” Jean was relieved. “I’ll carry you back, we need to report in so they don’t send a search party out.” Now Jean started to panic, picturing Eren carrying him bridal style in front of the other cadets; he’d likely never live this down.

“But I’m taller,” he spluttered, “Give me your gear, I should carry you instead!”

“You’re also injured and getting checked out by medical after this, so too bad, I’m carrying you.”

He almost regretted being rescued by Eren, *almost*.

Begrudgingly getting into the other’s arms, grumbling something about bad aerodynamics and balance issues – all deliberately ignored by Eren – the two slowly made their way back to camp.

"Doesn't look like you can escape the threat of titans even here."

“Fuck you Eren.”

End Notes

There just needs to be more Jean and Eren interactions. I love characters that love to hate each other; they're so fun to write.

The setup was mainly to address Eren's trauma from that day and I had the idea using Jean and a titan cut-out to do this. The dynamic and dialogue just came so easily and those last two lines were close to the first I wrote :D

(Also comments make me very happy)

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